

Airline to take wing after bumpy climb

By Toni J. Morris

Patriot Ledger Staff

QUINCY- Capt. Elpert T. Hodge of Quincy said it wasn't easy to create a charter air carrier line from Boston to New York and on to the Caribbean.

"It was rough," he said, describing his successful efforts to found Elan Air Corp., based in Boston.

The Fledgling Airline is acquiring its first aircraft about June 1.

"Thirteen years ago, I decided to establish my own airline after being refused a job as a pilot on St. John's, Antigua," said Hodge in the precise English of his native West Indies.

He petitioned Vere Cornwall Bird, Prime Minister of Antigua, for a loan to study at Burnside-Ott Aviation Training Center in Miami. His request was granted.

"Lester Bryant Bird, Deputy Prime Minister and son of Antigua's Prime Minister, paid for the initial research into the feasibility of an Antiguan airline," said Hodge.

But after the research had been completed, it was discovered the small island couldn't afford its own airline. Hodge packed up his belongings and the information he'd gathered and brought them to the home of his brother in Boston.

For two years Hodge studied at Boston State College, then worked at assorted odd jobs while

collecting more information at MIT and Harvard about how to make his dream of owning an airline a reality.

Those odd jobs included a stint with the Massachusetts Port Authority and the selling of his services as an aviation marketing consultant.

Finally, his efforts paid off when he was introduced to Virgil G. Oldham.

"Mr. Oldham directed me to success," said Hodge. Oldham rounded up the financial support Hodge needed and, in the process, became president of Elan Air.

Now Hodge eagerly awaits the arrival of his DC 8-55 and his first charter flight to the Caribbean June 30.

"This is a very unique airplane," said Elan's chief operating officer, Capt. Milton F. Marshall. "This is like having two airplanes in one."

The plane has been designed so it can be flown as a transcontinental-range luxury passenger airplane, then, with specialized handling equipment, quickly converted to fly cargo.

With those features, the needs of passenger and cargo clients can be met while Elan continues to add other aircraft to its fleet.

Elan Air has worldwide charter authority.

Captain Hodge is pleased with his new purchase and his airline. "It was constant belief and diligence that brought this about," he said.



Elan Air's DC-8 Perched at Manchester Airport - 1981